Toward an Integrative Educational System: Overcoming the Fragmentation of Knowledge and Adapting the Model to the Needs of Human Development in the 21st Century

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Abstract

The Spanish educational system, like most educational systems, is based on a psychopedagogical paradigm of genetic determinism that contemporary science has largely surpassed. Beyond its scientific obsolescence, the application of this paradigm in the educational system has had negative practical consequences: rigid structuring with biologically outdated educational stages, hierarchical ranking of academic knowledge over professional knowledge, naturalization of school failure as an individual deficit, gender biases and curricular ethnocentrism, and disconnection between abstract moral judgment and real ethical action. Starting from this critique and the empirical analysis of the system's failure to fulfill its aims, the article defends the need to integrate knowledge and adapt educational design to the real needs of human development and the present historical moment (artificial intelligence, ecological crisis). To this end, concrete measures are articulated in four dimensions: (1) reorganization of stages respecting biological rhythms; (2) integration of knowledge; (3) co-teaching as a mentoring strategy; (4) continuous and applied evaluation methodology. It is concluded that the transition toward an integrative model is a necessary condition for cultivating what is genuinely human in the age of AI.

Keywords: curricular integration; co-teaching; learning and teaching in the IZPD; human development; domain-specific talent; artificial intelligence; lifelong learning.

1. Introduction: A System That Does Not Fulfill Its Aims

The Spanish educational system is based on a psychopedagogical paradigm that has been surpassed by contemporary science. The theories of cognitive and moral development of Piaget and Kohlberg, which for decades have inspired school organization —characterized by their emphasis on universal stages, endogenous development, and morality based on abstract justice— today lack scientific validity in light of neuroscience (brain plasticity, innate social cognition), dynamic systems theory (non-linear development), cultural anthropology (cultural variability of mental processes), ethology (empathetic and moral nature), and feminist psychology (natural ethics of care versus an abstract and universal ethics).

Beyond its scientific obsolescence, the application of this paradigm has generated profound negative practical consequences in the educational system (Mascarell Pérez, 2026d):

1. Rigid and biologically outdated structuring: the transition from primary to secondary education set at age 12 —based on the supposed emergence of formal thought— forces students to change school and methodology at the peak of pubertal maturation (around age 14), ignoring evidence on actual biological rhythms.
2. Hierarchization of knowledge and discrimination against vocational training: by placing abstract logical-formal thinking as the pinnacle of development, practical knowledge was devalued, channeling students from disadvantaged backgrounds into lower-prestige professional tracks.
3. Naturalization of school failure as an individual deficit: the stage model legitimized evaluation systems that attribute failure to individual deficiencies rather than to systemic factors.
4. Gender biases and curricular ethnocentrism: the universal "epistemic subject" was, in reality, a Western male child, which led to curricula that render cultural differences invisible and devalue the ethics of care in favor of the ethics of justice.
5. Disconnection between judgment and moral action: the hegemony of the hypothetical dilemma-based approach ignored evidence that sophisticated moral reasoning does not automatically translate into real ethical behavior.

To this theoretical diagnosis is added an empirical fact: the analysis of official data (EPA, Eurostat, OECD, INE) shows that the Spanish educational system systemically fails to fulfill the aims it declares in its own legislation —it does not adequately prepare for employment, does not guarantee full personal development, does not promote social cohesion, nor does it train environmentally responsible citizens (Mascarell Pérez, 2026a). Successive educational reforms in Spain have failed because they did not consider the

contexts and circumstances that determine educational systems (Mascarell Pérez, s.f.).

To this diagnosis, two fundamental contributions are added for rethinking curricular design. The first is the urgency of distinguishing between essential human needs —learning without which integral human development is compromised— and desires —content that responds to circumstantial interests or market pressures (Mascarell Pérez, 2026b). The second is a conception of intelligence as domain-specific talent: the ability to develop deep and specialized knowledge in a specific area based on interest, deliberate practice, and prolonged dedication (Mascarell Pérez, 2026c). This conception implies that the educational system must offer flexible specialization pathways, not a uniform curriculum that only recognizes one type of academic excellence.

This article defends the need to integrate knowledge and adapt the design of the educational system to the real needs of human development and the present historical moment (artificial intelligence, climate crisis, inequality). Based on the critique of the hegemonic paradigm and the empirical evidence of the failure of the current system, concrete measures are articulated for a systemic transformation.

2. Method

This work is the result of a process of critical analysis and theoretical synthesis. It has been based on:

1. A review of the fundamental critiques of hegemonic evolutionary psychology, whose practical consequences in the educational system have been systematized in Mascarell Pérez (2026d), covering the neurobiological (Diamond, 2001; Lieberman, 2013; Iacoboni, 2008), anthropological (Mead, 1928; Rogoff, 2003), ethological (De Waal, 2006), dynamic systems (Thelen & Smith, 1994), and feminist (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984) dimensions.
2. The analysis of empirical evidence on the failure of the Spanish educational system to fulfill its aims and the formulation of an alternative theoretical framework based on the distinction between educational needs and desires and on the conception of intelligence as domain-specific talent (Mascarell Pérez, s.f., 2026a, 2026b, 2026c).
3. The integration of both sources to formulate a coherent educational proposal, organized into four dimensions: stages, content, teaching staff, and methodology/evaluation.

3. Results: An Integrative Educational System

3.1. Reorganization of Educational Stages: Respecting Biological Rhythm and Social Organization

The hegemonic psychopedagogical model imposed a rigid school structure that, in Spain, set the transition from primary to secondary education at age 12, based on the supposed emergence of formal thought. This decision ignores evidence on sexual maturation and the critical changes of puberty —which peak around age 14— and contradicts the principles of contemporary developmental psychology. Against this rigidity, an educational architecture is proposed that respects biological and social rhythms from early childhood through higher education.

Preschool Education (0-6 years). The stage from 0 to 6 years is voluntary and organized into two cycles of three years each: first cycle (0-3 years) and second cycle (3-6 years). Its objective is to guarantee early motor, sensory, affective, communicative, and social development, as well as early detection of specific educational support needs. It is based on play, movement, exploration of the environment, and affective bonding as the axes of learning. Another notable aspect is the establishment of habits and routines related to autonomy: personal hygiene, rest, care for cleanliness and order of the habitat, nutrition, etc. It is not compulsory, but the system guarantees sufficient supply and free access to the second cycle (3-6 years) for all families.

Basic General Education (6-14 years). This stage is compulsory and extends over eight years, divided into two cycles of four years: first cycle (6-10 years) and second cycle (10-14 years). It constitutes the common core of the system, where all students study the five major knowledge blocks (Communication, Humanity, Technology, Environment, Creativity) with the same class hours and without optionality. The transition to the next stage occurs at age 14, once the peak of pubertal maturation has passed, avoiding the forced change of school and methodology at the moment of greatest biological and emotional vulnerability.

Secondary Education (14-18 years). This stage is also compulsory and extends over four years, divided into two cycles of two years (14-16 and 16-18). It eliminates the hierarchical barrier between baccalaureate and vocational training, organizing itself into three equally valued pathways that share a common core of essential human knowledge (approximately 50% of class hours) and differentiate themselves in a deepening block (the remaining 50%):

- **Professional Secondary Education:** integrates the former Vocational Training, Artistic, Sports, and Musical Education. Oriented toward applied and creative knowledge.
- **Human and Social Secondary Education:** deepens understanding of the human being, society, history, and thought.
- **Technological and Environmental Secondary Education:** deepens understanding of the natural world and its transformation through engineering and computing.

This structure responds to the conception of intelligence as domain-specific talent: if intelligence is not a uniform general capacity, the system must offer diversified pathways that recognize multiple forms of excellence. The three pathways allow transit between them at the end of each cycle, without loss of grade.

Higher Education (18+ years). Voluntary in nature, it is structured into bachelor's degrees (3 years), master's degrees (2 years), and doctorates (2 years). Its distinctive feature is the integration of professional practice as a backbone from the first year: each academic year includes a trimester of professional internships in real environments, with dual tutors (academic and professional). This structure responds to the principle that knowledge is not an individual and abstract construction, but a social, embodied, and contextual process; immersion in a real professional environment is not a complement but the environment where that knowledge is forged and acquires meaning. (Table 1)

Stage	Age	Duration	Cycles	Character
Preschool Education	0-6 years	6 courses	0-3 and 3-6	Voluntary
Basic General Education	6-14 years	8 courses	6-10 and 10-14	Compulsory
Secondary Education	14-18 years	4 courses	14-16 and 16-18	Compulsory
Higher Education	18+	Bachelor (3), Master (2), Doctorate (2)	Variable	Voluntary

Table 1. Architecture of the proposed educational system

3.2. Integration of Content: From Fragmentation to Major Blocks

The fragmentation of knowledge into 10-12 subjects is a relic of the Taylorist organization of the curriculum. This structure prevents complex understanding of reality, hinders the establishment of meaningful pedagogical connections, and, as empirical analysis shows, has not achieved the aims the system claims to pursue. Added to this is that the current educational system does not adequately distinguish between educational needs and desires, generating inflated curricula where the accessory displaces the fundamental.

The grouping of knowledge into five major blocks is proposed:

Block	Integrated Disciplines
Communication	Mother tongue, foreign languages, literature, digital and media literacy, oratory, debate, creative and academic writing
Humanity	Prehistory, evolutionary anthropology, history, geography, economics, sociology, cultural anthropology, psychology, art history, philosophy, ethics
Technology	Mathematics, physics, programming, computer science, robotics, artificial intelligence, applied engineering, digital design and fabrication
Environment	Biology, chemistry, geology, ecology, environmental sciences, sustainable technology, circular economy, health and well-being
Creativity	Physical education and sport, music, visual and plastic arts, performing arts, audiovisual production, design, body expression, crafts

These five blocks are common to all students in Basic General Education and in the common core of Secondary Education, but are adapted in class hours and specific content according to the chosen pathway. One daily hour of physical-sports practice and another daily hour dedicated to creativity areas are maintained in all pathways, ensuring that movement and creation are not

complements but backbone axes of an education that aspires to cultivate the human in its totality.

3.3. Distribution and Training of Teachers: Co-teaching as a Mentoring Strategy at All Stages

The quality of an educational system is capped by the quality of its teaching staff and the conditions under which they work. The traditional model —one teacher per classroom or subject, with high ratios and little continuity— makes it impossible to build deep pedagogical relationships, contradicts the social nature of learning (Lieberman, 2013), and makes any genuine personalization unviable. To overcome this structural deficit, co-teaching is proposed as a backbone strategy in all compulsory stages and also in preschool education, with different levels of intensity according to age and degree of specialization required.

3.3.1. Full Co-teaching in Preschool Education (0-6 years)

In Preschool Education, where the foundations of motor, affective, communicative, and social development are laid, the presence of two reference adults is especially relevant. A full co-teaching model is proposed from the first cycle (0-3 years), with the following characteristics:

- Maximum ratio per group: 15 students in the first cycle (0-3 years) and 20 students in the second cycle (3-6 years).
- Two stable educators per group throughout the entire cycle (three years in each cycle). Both share planning, daily attention, and evaluation.
- Daily organization: while one educator leads an activity (symbolic play, sensory exploration, storytelling, psychomotricity), the second educator observes, records, attends to individual needs (hygiene, sleep, nutrition), and facilitates the inclusion of children with specific needs.
- Continuity and bonding: the stability of the educational team throughout the entire cycle allows building secure attachment, early detection of developmental difficulties, and maintaining fluid communication with families.

This organization guarantees personalized attention, reduces children's stress during adaptation to the school, and creates an environment of emotional security, a necessary condition for learning at these ages.

3.3.2. Full Co-teaching in Basic General Education (6-14 years)

Each group of maximum 30 students has two stable teachers throughout the entire cycle. In the first half of the school day, Teacher A teaches the

Communication and Humanity blocks while Teacher B remains in the classroom as support; in the second half, the roles are reversed. Advantages: effective ratio reduced to 30 students per teacher per year, immediate support, joint planning, stability, and bonding.

3.3.3. Block Teaching Teams with Partial Co-teaching in Secondary Education (14-18 years)

In Secondary Education, where specialization by pathway requires greater disciplinary mastery, co-teaching cannot be full-time for all hours, but it must be present flexibly and systematically. Each knowledge block is taught by a team of two teachers who share the classroom at least 30% of the weekly time. During those sessions, one teacher leads the explanation while the second facilitates attention to diversity. Additionally, teaching teams remain with the same group for the two years of each cycle (looping). A student interacts with 5-8 teachers, compared to 10-12 in the traditional model.

3.3.4. Teacher Training and Cycle Rotation

The implementation of co-teaching requires a profound reform of the Master's in Teacher Training (and of the bachelor's degrees in early childhood education), training future teachers in integrated didactics, collaborative work in the classroom, and collegial evaluation. A cycle rotation every four years is also proposed to favor professional development and avoid hierarchization between stages. (Table 2)

Variable	Traditional Model	Full Co-teaching (Preschool)	Full Co-teaching (BGE)	Flexible Co-teaching (Secondary)
Students per teacher	150-200 (or variable in early childhood)	15 (0-3) / 20 (3-6)	30	60-90
Teachers a student sees	1-2 (early childhood) or 10-12 (primary/secondary)	2	2	5-8

Variable	Traditional Model	Full Co-teaching (Preschool)	Full Co-teaching (BGE)	Flexible Co-teaching (Secondary)
Permanence with same group	1 year (or variable)	3 years (full cycle)	4 years (full cycle)	2 years (full cycle)
In-class support	Non-existent or very limited	Yes, systematic	Yes, systematic (50% time)	Yes, at least 30% time

Table 2. Comparison of traditional and proposed teaching models

3.4. Methodology and Evaluation: Projects and Challenges

3.4.1. Project-Based Methodology and Comprehensive Dynamic Evaluation

Learning should pose an individual and collective challenge, connected to real and relevant problems for students, situated in the Integral Zone of Proximal Development (Mascarell, 2026). Projects should connect, whenever possible, with real needs of the environment (service-learning). The conception of intelligence as domain-specific talent reinforces this need: talent is not developed through passive reception, but through deliberate practice, problem-solving, and the creation of meaningful products. Against standardized examinations, a comprehensive and dynamic evaluation is proposed based on:

- **Portfolios:** gather the student's process, evolution, and reflections.
- **Competency rubrics:** evaluate both the final product and transversal skills (proficiency, collaboration, critical thinking, communication, creativity).
- **Public defense of projects:** before a panel that includes teachers, internship tutors, and community representatives.
- **Collegial evaluation:** taking advantage of the stability of the teaching team.

3.4.2. Elimination of University Entrance Exams and New Admission System

The current university access system (EBAU, Selectividad, or equivalent exams) severely conditions and distorts the last two years of Secondary Education. Instead of deep, meaningful, competency-oriented learning, students and schools dedicate a substantial portion of class time to training to pass external standardized tests. This pressure induces curriculum narrowing (teaching to the test), increases anxiety and inequity, and contradicts all principles of ecological and formative evaluation. Therefore, the complete elimination of external entrance exams is proposed and their replacement with an admission system based on three components:

1. **40% - Average grade of the entire Secondary Education academic record (14-18 years).** This indicator reflects the student's sustained trajectory, not their performance on a single exam.
2. **40% - Grades from the last two years (16-18 years) in subjects or knowledge blocks directly related to the studies the student wishes to pursue.** For example, for an Engineering degree, grades in the Technology block will be weighted.
3. **20% - Statement of interest and in-person interview** before a selection committee from the corresponding faculty. The student presents a brief document (maximum 1,500 words) stating their reasons, their learning trajectory in the area of interest, and their professional expectations. Subsequently, a committee formed by faculty members and, where appropriate, external professionals conducts an interview of about 20-30 minutes to assess motivation, maturity, and the suitability of the profile for the requested studies. This component introduces a qualitative element that no standardized test can capture.

Application procedure and guarantees. Each student may apply, in order of preference, to a maximum of three degrees at three different universities (or the same one). Faculties will publish their specific weighting criteria within the above percentages. In case of not being selected in any of the three options, the student retains the possibility of accessing university through the adult pathway (with no age limit) by taking the studies through the distance flexible training model with AI described in section 3.5.2. This pathway overcomes any access barrier and guarantees the right to higher education throughout life.

This new system eliminates the need for bridge courses, private exam preparation academies, and the stress associated with a single determining exam. Furthermore, it restores to the last two years of secondary education their genuine function: deep learning and the development of domain-specific talent, not preparation for an external test.

3.5. Lifelong Learning: Integration of Qualifications and Flexible Training with AI

The educational model proposed here is not exhausted in compulsory stages or in initial higher education. A society that changes at an accelerating pace —due to automation, ecological transition, and digital transformation— demands a lifelong learning system that offers real second (and third) opportunities, as well as professional readaptation pathways. To this end, two complementary dimensions are articulated.

3.5.1. Integration of Qualifications and Legal Equalization of Professional Experience

The current educational system maintains a sealed separation between formal training (degrees, bachelor's, master's) and competencies acquired through professional experience or non-formal education. This duality particularly harms those who left the system early and accredit unrecognized practical knowledge. It is proposed:

- **A single professional qualifications system:** integrating academic degrees and experience-based certifications into the same framework, with comparable levels (from basic to expert).
- **Full legal equalization:** accredited professional experience (through competency evaluation procedures, portfolios, and performance tests) will have the same effects as formal vocational training for access to public employment, internal promotion, and educational continuity.
- **Agile evidence-based accreditation procedures** (on-the-job observation, simulation, professional interview) and not only theoretical exams.

3.5.2. Vocational and University Training Compatible with Work and Family Life: Blended Learning, Distance Learning, and Personalized AI

The current offering of Vocational Training and university studies is designed primarily for full-time young people, effectively excluding adults with work or family responsibilities. To reverse this situation, it is proposed:

- **Blended and distance learning as a right, not as an exception.** All vocational and bachelor's degrees must offer a flexible pathway that allows between 50% and 100% of credits to be taken in non-face-to-face mode.
- **Flexible methodologies and evaluations:** elimination of the rigidity of fixed schedules; students will be able to advance at their own pace

through modules or micro-credentials, with continuous assessments and open calls.

- **Personalized tutoring with artificial intelligence agents:** each student will have an AI tutor that, based on a model of their prior knowledge, learning style, and pace, is capable of:
    - Selecting and generating materials in multiple formats (text, video, interactive simulation, adaptive exercises).
    - Applying different teaching methodologies (discovery learning, direct instruction, case studies, problem-based learning) depending on the task and the student's cognitive state.
    - Adapting to the learner's integral Zone of Proximal Development: not only their cognitive level, but also their motivation, emotional state, work context, and time availability. The AI agent identifies which tasks the student can perform with help and which they already master, offering progressive scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978).
    - Providing immediate and personalized feedback, simulating the accompaniment of a human teacher.
- **Human reference supervision:** the AI agent does not replace the human teacher-tutor but assists them. Each group of distance learning students will have a teacher-tutor who reviews AI reports, conducts periodic synchronous sessions, and attends to cases that the machine cannot resolve.

This flexible training model with AI is not a minor concession but a requirement of educational justice: it allows adults to combine learning with their lives without having to abandon either work or family.

4. Discussion

The proposal articulated here is not a mere technical adjustment but a profound transformation that responds to the need to overcome an exhausted psychopedagogical paradigm —whose negative consequences have been systematized in Mascarell Pérez (2026d)— and to adapt the educational system to the real needs of human development and the present historical moment.

Current events reinforce the urgency of this change. Artificial intelligence and robotization are transforming the labor market and pose a radical challenge to the very meaning of education. If machines can process data, generate texts, and solve complex problems, the function of the school can no longer be the mere transmission of information. Its new purpose, and the most genuinely human one, is to cultivate what no machine can replicate: the capacity to create meaning, to collaborate in solving complex problems, to deliberate about what is just, and to build community.

The distinction between educational needs and desires acquires capital relevance here. In a world saturated with information, the curriculum must focus on learning without which integral human development is compromised. The five knowledge blocks respond to this need.

Co-teaching, deployed from Preschool Education through Secondary Education, and cycle-based mentoring are necessary conditions for inclusive education: learning cannot be personalized without knowing the student, and the student cannot be known from the distance of an isolated subject, a teacher attending two hundred students, and a standardized exam.

The elimination of universal external point-in-time tests, including university entrance exams, and their replacement with a continuous and personalized system based on understanding, transfer, and application of learning, restores to education its formative function, reduces inequity and stress, and favors the integral development of human potential.

Lifelong learning, with the integration of qualifications and flexible training supported by AI, extends the principle of personalization beyond school age. The zone of proximal development does not close at 18; adults also learn better when a system (human or artificial) offers them the right scaffolding at the right moment.

Among the study's limitations, the specification of content selection criteria for each block and each pathway requires detailed development that exceeds the limits of this article. Future research should address both curricular development, pilot studies, and various implementation strategies adapted to different realities.

5. Conclusions

The hegemonic educational system has failed to fulfill its aims. The psychopedagogical paradigm that has sustained it for decades has been surpassed by contemporary science, and its application has generated profound negative consequences that have been systematized in the integral refutation of Piaget and Kohlberg's educational psychology (Mascarell Pérez, 2026d).

Against this exhausted model, a systemic transformation is proposed based on the following five pillars:

1. **Reorganization of stages:** transition to secondary education at age 14 and three pathways (Professional, Human-Social, Technological-Environmental) that eliminate the hierarchy between academic and professional knowledge and recognize the diversity of talents. In Higher

Education, one trimester of professional internships each year as a backbone.

2. **Integration of knowledge:** five major blocks (Communication, Humanity, Technology, Environment, and Creativity) common to all pathways but adapted in weight and content, overcoming the artificial fragmentation of knowledge and focusing on essential educational needs.
3. **Co-teaching and stable mentoring:** from Preschool Education (with two educators per group) through Basic General Education (full co-teaching) to Secondary Education (block teams with partial co-teaching), guaranteeing reduced ratios, classroom support, and continuity of the pedagogical bond.
4. **Challenge-based methodology and continuous personalized evaluation:** meaningful projects connected to real problems, and evaluation through portfolios, rubrics, and public defenses; eliminating universal external evaluation tests, and facilitating comprehensive, accessible training adapted to personal interests and environmental demands.
5. **Lifelong learning:** a single qualifications system that legally equalizes professional experience with formal training, and flexible offerings (blended and distance) of vocational and university studies, with personalized tutoring through AI agents that adapt to each person's integral zone of proximal development.

The era of artificial intelligence forces us to rethink the meaning of education. In a world where machines can do more and more, the school and the continuing education system must focus on what makes us human. The integrative, ecological, and lifelong model outlined here represents a possible and necessary roadmap for this transition.

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